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ABSTRACT

The report summarizes data on the postsecondary educational experiences of 1980 high school graduates based on three major longitudinal data sets: the National Longitudinal Survey of the 1972 high school class; the High School and Beyond study of 1980 high school seniors; and the High School and Beyond study of 1980 high school sophomores. Findings include the following: (1) about one-third of the graduates of the high school class of 1980 had not enrolled in postsecondary education by 1986; (2) more than half of those high school graduates who began full time at four-year institutions in the fall of 1980 continued as full-time students for four years, while the others either dropped out of postsecondary education or followed an alternative path, such as part-time enrollment or temporarily leaving and then returning to school; (3) more than 80% of 1980 high school graduates who followed an alternative path into postsecondary education enrolled at a community college or other less-than-baccalaureate level institution; (4) 1980 high school graduates who began and continued full-time at four-year institutions earned about 60% of the baccalaureate degrees awarded to 1980 high school graduates by 1986; (5) Black and Hispanic students and students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds who began and continued full-time at four-year institutions were less likely than white students and those from more prosperous backgrounds to have earned a Bachelor's degree by 1986. (LPT)

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CRS Report for Congress

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Postsecondary Educational Experiences of High School Graduates

Richard N. Apling
Specialist in Social Legislation
Education and Public Welfare Division

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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POSTSECONDARY EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES

SUMMARY

This report summarizes data on the postsecondary educational experiences of high school graduates. Much of the report focuses on students who spend at least some time attending 4-year colleges and universities; however, the report also discusses students who attend other types of postsecondary institutions and those who never attended any postsecondary institution. Based on data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) of the U.S. Department of Education, the major findings are:

- About one-third of the graduates of the high school class of 1980 had not enrolled in postsecondary education by 1986; approximately 30 percent enrolled full time in a 4-year institution in the fall of 1980; nearly 40 percent followed some other path into postsecondary education.
- More than one-half of those high school graduates who began full time at 4-year institutions in the fall of 1980 continued as full-time students for 4 years; the other 45 percent either dropped out of postsecondary education or continued on an alternative path, such as part-time enrollment or temporarily leaving and then returning to school.
- More than 80 percent of 1980 high school graduates who followed an alternative path into postsecondary education enrolled at a community college or other less-than-baccalaureate institutions. The others began part-time 4-year programs or delayed beyond fall 1980 their entry into 4-year institutions.
- 1980 high school graduates who began and continued full-time at 4-year institutions earned about 60 percent of the baccalaureate degrees (B.A.s) awarded to 1980 high school graduates by 1986.
- Black and Hispanic students and students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds who began and continued full time at 4-year institutions were less likely than white students and those from more prosperous backgrounds to have earned a B.A. by 1986.
- Slightly more than 20 percent of 1980 high school graduates who entered community colleges and other less-than-baccalaureate institutions attained an Associate degree or certificate within 4 years of high school graduation.
- High school graduates who are minority group members or come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are less likely to enroll in any postsecondary institution.

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POSTSECONDARY EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES

OVERVIEW AND SOURCES OF DATA

This report summarizes data on the postsecondary educational experiences of a nationally representative group of 1980 high school graduates. Much of the focus is on students who spent at least some time attending 4-year institutions; however, in addition to discussing students who followed the "traditional" path to a baccalaureate degree (beginning in the fall after high school graduation and continuing full time for 4 years at a 4-year institution), the report also discusses those who followed other paths into and through postsecondary education and those who never attended any postsecondary institution.

Data collected from students over a multi-year period are critical for examining postsecondary experiences. With respect to educational experience at this level, three longitudinal data sets are currently consulted to track students over time.

- *The National Longitudinal Survey* of the high school class of 1972 (NLS-72), which has collected data on the class of 1972 as recently as 1986;
- *The High School and Beyond* study of 1980 high school seniors (HS&B senior cohort), which has followed those seniors through early 1986; and
- *The High School and Beyond* study of 1980 high school sophomores (HS&B senior cohort), which has follow-up data through early 1986.

This report depends chiefly on data from the HS&B senior cohort because these are more recent than NLS-72 data.¹ In addition, the HS&B senior cohort has the advantage over the sophomore cohort of providing 2 more years of data after high school. In 1986 the 1980 sophomores were only 4 years past their date of high school graduation. This is insufficient time to assess postsecondary education experience because many students—even those attending 4-year

¹The NLS-72 data provide an unprecedented time perspective on the seniors of 1972. However, some believe that the data may not completely reflect the educational experiences of students in the 1980s and 1990s.

institutions full time--do not finish in 4 years. The average baccalaureate (B.A.) completion time for the class of 1972 was 4.5 years² and may be longer now.

Despite the advantages of the HS&B senior data, several limitations of the data set must be noted. First, although current follow-up data provide nearly 6 years of information as opposed to 4 years for the sophomore class, this is insufficient time to analyze the complete persistence and completion patterns of the 1980 seniors. For example, analyses from NLS-72 indicate that, although nearly 90 percent of all B.A.s were earned by 1978 (approximately 6 years after graduation), 5 percent of these degrees were earned 9 or more years after graduation. Similarly, nearly 10 percent of those students whose highest degree was the Associate's degree earned that credential at least 9 years after their class had graduated from high school.³

Data for the 1980 high school seniors were initially collected in February of 1980. Students who dropped out prior to this date were not included in the original data collection or in follow-up surveys. Thus, HS&B excludes information relating to the attendance, persistence, and completion rates of high school dropouts who may have earned a General Education Development certificate (GED) and entered postsecondary institutions or entered postsecondary institutions as "ability-to-benefit" students.⁴ HS&B also contains no information relating to the postsecondary experiences of students graduating from high school before 1980 who were attending colleges, 2-year institutions, and less-than-2-year schools during the period from the fall of 1980 to February 1986.

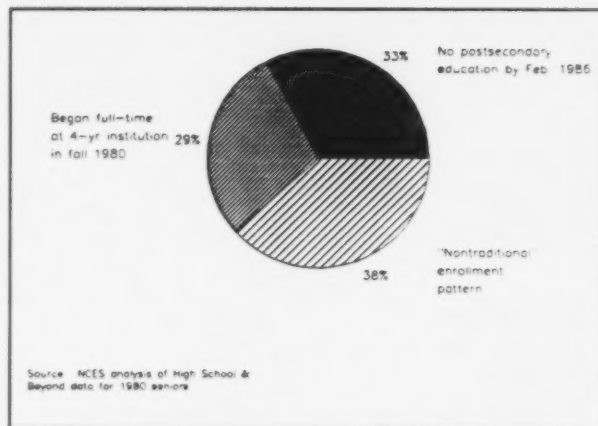


Figure 1. Postsecondary educational experiences of 1980 high school graduates

²Adelman, Clifford. *Archives of a Generation: The High School Class of '72 at Thirtysomething* (in press).

³U.S. Department of Education. *A College Course Map*, by Clifford Adelman. Washington, D.C., Oct. 1990, p. 248-249. It is important to remember that the experiences of 1972 high school graduates could differ substantially from those of high school graduates in the 1980s and 1990s.

⁴Students who have not earned a high school diploma, its equivalent, or a General Education Development Certificate (GED) can be eligible to receive Federal student aid if they demonstrate the "ability to benefit" from the education offered.

Keeping these limitations in mind, HS&B data can provide significant information. The remainder of this report discusses HS&B data for three groups of 1980 high school graduates:⁶ those who began immediately on the "traditional" postsecondary path leading to a B.A. (i.e., began full-time at a 4-year institution in the fall of 1980); those who followed a "nontraditional" path into and through postsecondary education; and those who, by early 1986, had no postsecondary educational experience.

Figure 1 breaks down 1980 high school graduates into these three groups. It shows that 29 percent began full-time study at a 4-year institution in the fall of 1980 and that 38 percent followed some other path into postsecondary education. For example, some delayed their entry into 4-year institutions while others entered 2-year or less-than-2-year institutions. All the rest (roughly one-third) had reported no postsecondary experience by February 1986.

PATHWAYS INTO AND THROUGH POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

This section discusses various routes followed into and through postsecondary education by the two of three 1980 graduates reporting at least some postsecondary education by February 1986.

The "Traditional" Path

Approximately 30 percent of the 1980 high school graduates began full-time study at 4-year institutions in the fall of 1980. These students might be said to have begun the "traditional" route to a B.A. Figure 2 indicates that slightly more than one-half of these students (55 percent) continued full time in 4-year institutions for 4 years. That is, they "persisted" for 4 years. The other 45 percent began full time but switched to some other status:

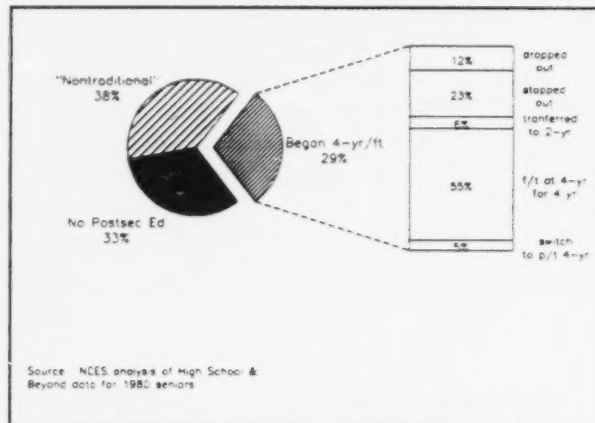


Figure 2. Postsecondary educational experiences of 1980 high school graduates who enrolled full time in a 4-year institution in the fall of 1980

⁶High School and Beyond contains data on high school seniors in 1980. A small percentage of these seniors did not graduate with their class and are excluded from results. Unless otherwise noted data reported here are for 1980 high school graduates. Any group differences discussed in this report are statistically significant at the .05 level unless otherwise noted.

Most of the data reported here were adapted from: U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics. *College Persistence and Degree Attainment for 1980 High School Graduates: Hazards for Transfers, Stopouts, and Part-Timers*. Survey Report CS 89-302, by C. Dennis Carroll. Washington, D.C., Jan. 1989. (Hereafter cited as Carroll, *College Persistence and Degree Attainment*)

- 12 percent of students beginning full-time at 4-year institutions dropped out (i.e., they had not returned to any form of postsecondary education by February 1986).
- 23 percent "stopped out" (i.e., they stopped attending for some period and then returned to a 4-year institution).
- 6 percent transferred to a community college or some other less-than-4-year institution.
- 5 percent switched to part-time status.

"Nontraditional" Paths

Approximately 40 percent of 1980 high school graduates began their postsecondary educational careers on some "nontraditional" path. Figure 3 shows that:

- 20 percent of these students entered less-than-2-year schools and never transferred to an institution at another level.
- 44 percent entered 2-year schools and never transferred to another level.
- 15 percent delayed their full time entry into 4-year institutions.
- 18 percent transferred from less-than-2-year to 4-year institutions sometime between 1980 and 1986.
- 3 percent entered 4-year institutions part time in the fall of 1980.

Thus, more than 80 percent of 1980 graduates who followed "nontraditional" paths enrolled at some time in community colleges and other less-than-baccalaureate institutions.

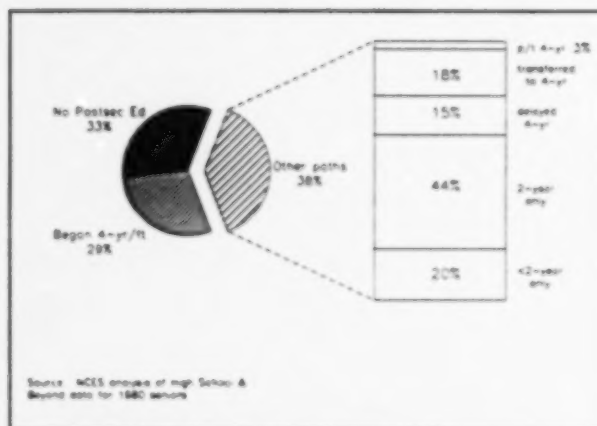


Figure 3. Postsecondary educational experiences of 1980 high school graduates who followed "nontraditional" educational paths after high school

STUDENTS EARNING B.A.s BY FEBRUARY 1986

About 20 percent of the 1980 high school graduates reported earning a B.A. by February 1986. A majority of these students followed the "traditional" route to a B.A.: they entered 4-year institutions full time in the fall after graduating from high school and persisted full time for 4 years. Figure 4 shows that students following this path earned more than 60 percent of the B.A.s reported when students were surveyed in February 1986.⁶ It is important to note that not all students following the traditional path reported earning a B.A. after 5½ years. Approximately one in four had not.

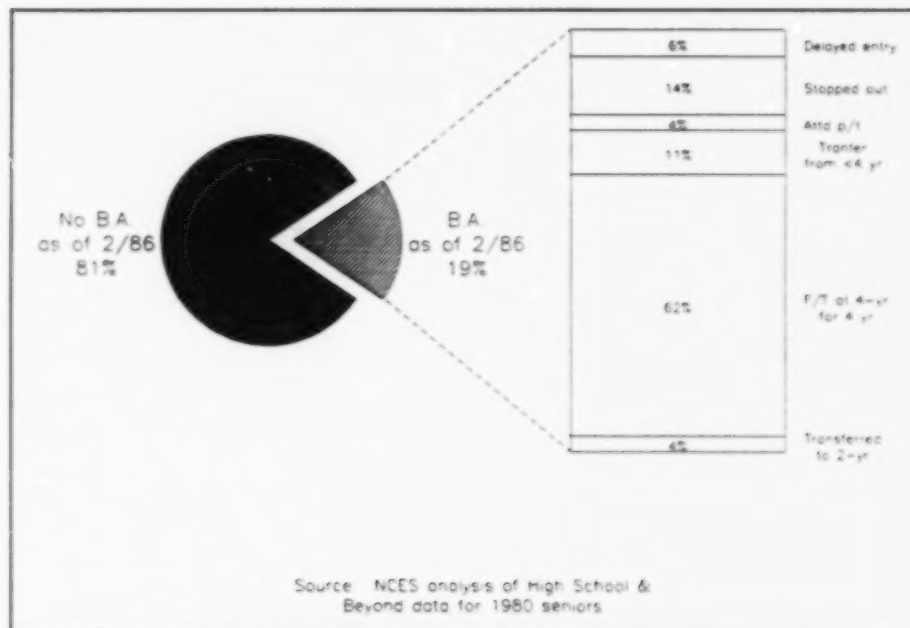


Figure 4. Postsecondary educational experiences of 1980 high school graduates who reported earning a B.A. by February 1986

Figure 4 also shows that even in this relatively short period of time some students following alternative paths reported earning a B.A. after 5½ years. There are many possible alternative routes to completing a B.A. For some routes 5½ years is not enough time for anyone to finish a B.A. For example, a student beginning half time and continuing half time through his or her college career would require considerably longer than 5½ years to complete a 4-year degree. Here we discuss six routes--three involving students who began full time at 4-year institutions but switched to some other route and three involving students who followed "nontraditional" paths from the beginning.

⁶Whether a student has earned a B.A. or other educational credential is based on self-reporting. No doubt there are some inaccuracies in students' reports of their educational attainment.

- 14 percent of the B.A.s were earned by students who began full time and "stopped out." That is, they left college for some time and returned full time.
- 11 percent of the B.A.s were earned by students who began at a 2-year or less-than-2-year school and transferred to a 4-year institution.
- 6 percent of the B.A.s were earned by students who delayed entry into college. That is, they began their study sometime after the fall of 1980.
- 4 percent of the B.A.s were earned by those who attended 4-year institutions part time for at least some period during their enrollment
- 4 percent of the B.A.s earned by 1986 were reported by students who had begun full time at 4-year institutions, transferred to 2-year or less-than-2-year schools, and then presumably transferred back to a 4-year institution.⁷

Who Followed the "Traditional" Path and Earned a B.A.?

Of those reporting a B.A. by February 1986, a majority followed the "traditional" path to the degree. Figure 5 shows several characteristics of 1980 graduates who enrolled at 4-year institutions in the fall of 1980, continued full time for 4 years, and reported having earned a B.A. when surveyed in February 1986. Overall about 75 percent of 1980 seniors who followed the full-time, 4-

⁷Another perspective on completion is to examine the percentage of students following each path who earned a B.A. HS&B data indicate that:

- 75 percent of those following "traditional" path full-time for 4 years earned a B.A.
- 18 percent of those beginning part-time reported earning a B.A.
- 21 percent of those who delayed entry earned a B.A.
- 29 percent of those who began full time at a less-than-4-year institution and transferred to a 4-year institution earned a B.A.
- 40 percent who began at a 4-year institution but transferred to a less-than-4-year institution earned a B.A.
- 34 percent who began full time but switched to part time earned a B.A.
- 39 percent who "stopped out" earned a B.A. (Carroll, *College Persistence and Degree Attainment*, p. 20, 23).

In evaluating these results, it is important to remember that the percentages would be higher if data were available for a longer time period.

year path had earned B.A.s by February 1986.⁸ However, some were more likely than others to have earned a B.A. Women in this group were more likely than men to have earned a B.A. (77 percent to 70 percent). Blacks and Hispanics following the "traditional" path were significantly less likely than whites to have earned a B.A. Somewhat over 50 percent of blacks and Hispanics who had attended college full time for 4 years had earned a B.A. by 1986. More than 75 percent of the white graduates reported earning a B.A.⁹

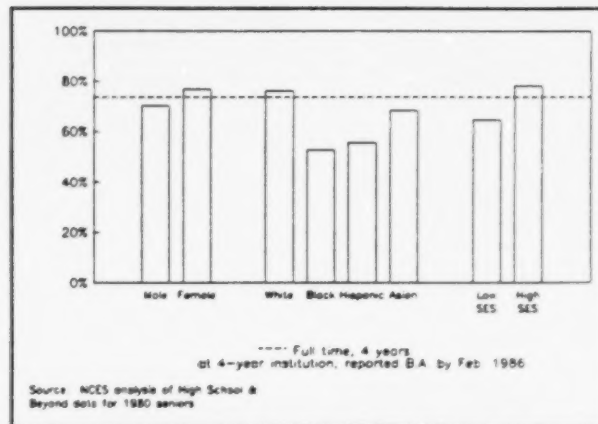


Figure 5. Characteristics of 1980 high school graduates who attended a 4-year institution full-time for 4 years and reported earning a B.A.

Students from the lowest socioeconomic status (SES) quartile¹⁰ were also less likely than those from the top quartile to report earning a B.A. About 65 percent of students from the lowest quartile and nearly 80 percent of those from the top quartile reported earning B.A.s after enrolling in college full time for 4 years.

Who Followed "Nontraditional" Paths and Earned a B.A.?

Less than 30 percent of those 1980 graduates who began on the "traditional" path to a B.A. but switched to a "nontraditional" path (e.g., enrolled part time or "stopped out") had earned a B.A. by February 1986. At least part of the explanation for the lower rate is that the HS&B senior cohort does not have data on outcomes for these students 6 and more years after high school graduation. Presumably, longer term data would reveal higher completion rates for these students.

Since "nontraditional" routes into and through postsecondary education were common in the 1980s--as noted earlier, roughly 45 percent of students who began on the "traditional" path switched to some "nontraditional" route--it is

⁸The dotted line in figure 5 indicates the overall B.A. completion rate of 75 percent for students attending full time for 4 years at 4-year institutions.

⁹The difference between the percentage of whites and the percentage of Asians in this group earning B.A.s was not statistically significant.

¹⁰The NCES-created indicator of SES is "a composite of family income, parental education levels, parental occupations, and the availability of items (for example, dishwasher) in the household." Carroll, *College Persistence and Degree Attainment*, p. 6.

useful to know who followed "nontraditional" paths and earned a B.A.

Figure 6 shows that men and women who began but left the "traditional" B.A. path were equally likely to have earned a B.A. by February 1986.¹¹ Blacks and Hispanics following this path were much less likely than whites to have a B.A. While about 30 percent of whites reported earning a B.A., only about half that percentage of blacks and Hispanics possessed a B.A.¹² Students categorized in the lowest SES quartile were less likely than high SES students to report earning a B.A. Less than 20 percent of the former and nearly 35 percent of the latter reported earning a B.A. by February 1986.

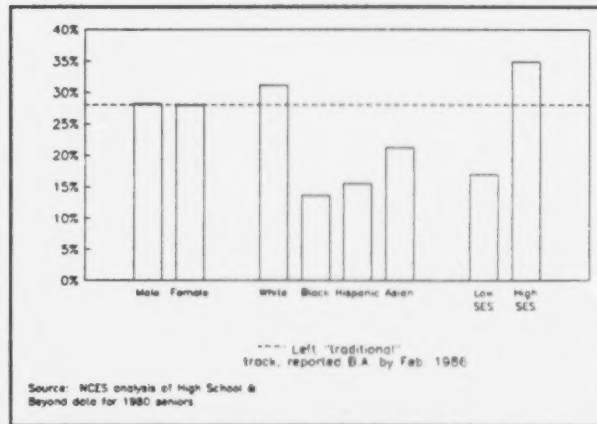


Figure 6. Characteristics of 1980 high school graduates who left the "traditional" path and earned a B.A. by February 1986

POSTSECONDARY STUDENTS REPORTING NO B.A.

This section describes some of the 1980 graduates who attended postsecondary institutions and did not earn a B.A. In particular, this section examines educational outcomes for students who attended community colleges, public technical institutes, and proprietary schools at some time within 4 years of high school graduation.¹³

By 4 years after graduation, about 23 percent of those 1980 seniors entering less-than-baccalaureate institutions had completed an Associate degree or a certificate. Forty-three percent had dropped out (i.e., they had left without any credential). Twenty-two percent had transferred (without earning a credential) to some other postsecondary institution--mostly, but not exclusively, 4-year institutions. The remainder (approximately 13 percent) were still in school.

¹¹The dotted line in figure 6 indicates the overall B.A. completion rate of about 28 percent for students who began full-time at 4-year institutions but switched to other paths.

¹²The difference between the percentage of whites and the percentage of Asians in this group earning B.A.'s was not statistically significant.

¹³The High School and Beyond data in this section have been adapted from Grubb, W. Norton Dropouts, Spells of Time, and Credits in Postsecondary Education: Evidence from Longitudinal Surveys. *Economics of Education Review*, v. 8, no. 1, 1989. p. 49-67. (Hereafter referred to as Grubb, *Dropouts, Spells of Time, and Credits*)

Figure 7 suggests that these rates are different for various types of less-than-baccalaureate institutions. Fewer than 20 percent of students enrolled in community colleges completed their program and received a credential. Completion rates are higher at public technical institutes and proprietary schools, which usually offer shorter programs than community colleges. Approximately one-third of those enrolled in technical institutions and proprietary schools had completed an educational credential by 4 years after high school graduation.

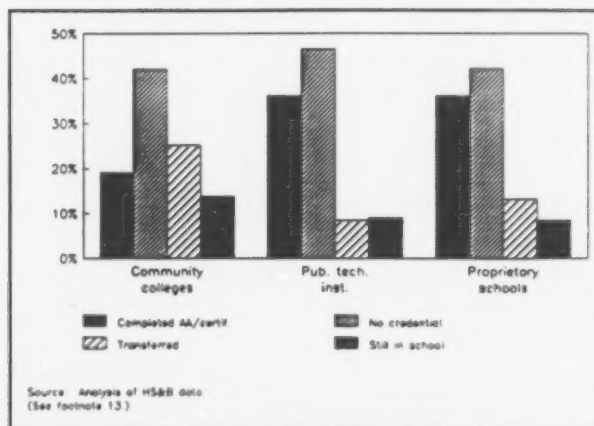


Figure 7. Educational outcomes for 1980 seniors who entered less-than-4-year institutions (1980-1984)

The rates of those who left with no credential were similar for students enrolled at the three types of institutions--somewhat over 40 percent. Transfer rates were higher for community college students than for those enrolled in technical institutes and proprietary schools (about 25 percent for community colleges and roughly 10 percent for the other institutions).

Since nearly 13 percent of the students who enrolled in less-than-baccalaureate institutions were still in school 4 years after graduation, completion rates probably would be somewhat higher if follow-up data from later years were available for these students. In addition, the percentage of students leaving school with no credential might also increase. Grubb argues that:

Looking at a longer span of time has the effect of increasing rather than decreasing the dropout rate, especially for institutions other than four-year colleges, because a disproportionate fraction of those who take a long time to progress through postsecondary institutions and those who delay their entry into postsecondary education--and who are more likely to be still in school at the end of a shorter period of observation--leave before completing any credential.¹⁴

HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES WITH NO POSTSECONDARY EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE

This section discusses the one-in-three 1980 high school graduates who reported no postsecondary educational experience by February 1986. While

¹⁴Grubb, *Dropouts, Spells of Time, and Credits*, p. 53.

some of these students may eventually seek postsecondary education, it is likely that substantial numbers will have no contact with the postsecondary educational system. Data from 1972 high school seniors indicate that about three-fourths of all students who enrolled in postsecondary education did so within a year after high school graduation. More than 90 percent of all those who would enroll in an institution of higher education by 1984 had enrolled within 5 years after high school graduation.¹⁵

High School and Beyond data give us some information about the 1980 graduates who had not enrolled in postsecondary education. Figure 8 indicates that they are somewhat more likely to be men than women.¹⁶ Approximately 35 percent of male 1980 high school graduates and 30 percent of female graduates reported no postsecondary education by February 1986.

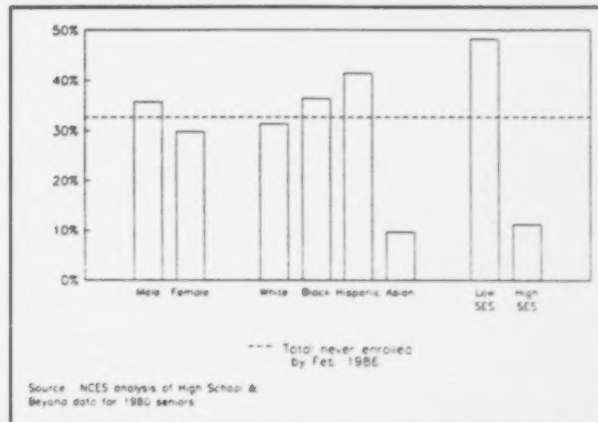


Figure 8. Characteristics of 1980 high school graduates who had never enrolled in postsecondary education by February 1986

Those who never enrolled in any postsecondary institution are also more likely to be black and Hispanic and less likely to be Asian. While about 30 percent of white graduates enrolled in no postsecondary education, 36 percent of black graduates and more than 40 percent of Hispanic graduates reported no postsecondary education. Only 10 percent who identified themselves as Asian reported that they had no postsecondary education by 1986.

Figure 8 also shows that students in the lowest SES quartile were much more likely than high SES students to report no postsecondary education. Nearly 50 percent of low SES students and about 10 percent of high SES students reported having no postsecondary educational experience 5½ years after high school.

¹⁵U.S. Department of Education. National Center for Education Statistics. *Student Progress in College: NLS-72 Postsecondary Education Transcript Student, 1984*. Survey Report CS 89-411, by Paula R. Knepper. Washington, D.C., Feb. 1989. p. 41-Table B-1.

¹⁶The dotted line in figure 8 indicates the percentage of all high school graduates (33 percent) who never enrolled in any postsecondary institution as of Feb. 1986 and is useful baseline for comparing various groups of 1980 graduates.